



53 Haddonfield Road, Cherry Hill, NJ 08002 • (609) 482-0222

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE TEAM FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE REMOVAL AND PREVENTION
EPA CONTRACT 68-01-7367

MEMORANDUM

TO: Garrett Arai, OSC, U.S. EPA Region III PCS #1305
THRU: Rich Habrukowich, TATL, Region III *RAH* TDD #8707-23
FROM: Todd Chocholaty, TAIM, Region III *TCH*
SUBJECT: Belfield Avenue Site Trip Report
Germantown, Philadelphia Co., Pennsylvania
DATE: July 27, 1987

Background

The Visual Packaging Company is a chemical repackaging and specialty chemical blender located at 5238 Belfield Ave. in Germantown, PA. The products packaged and blended at the facility include: hand soap, gasfinder, waterfinder, zinc oxide products, methanol blends, brake fluid, and isopropyl alcohol. Raw materials for the blending were stored in six (6) 1000 gallon tanks.

On July 14, 1987, the Visual Packaging Co. building was damaged by explosions followed by fire. The cause of the blast is currently under investigation. Effects of the blasts on the building included shattered glass, blown out brick and concrete walls, collapsed roof, and general fire damage to portions of the interior.

Assessment Activities

On July 14, 1987, 1015 hours, TAIMs Kevin Scott, Jack Williams, and OSC Garrett Arai responded to the fire and explosion. The Philadelphia Fire Department (PFD) was on scene to suppress the fire. The PFD contacted the EPA Emergency Response Section (ERS) to request technical assistance at 0800 hours. The time of the explosions was given at 0550 hours.

Roy F. Weston, Inc.

SPILL PREVENTION & EMERGENCY RESPONSE DIVISION

In Association with ICF Technology Inc., C.C. Johnson & Associates, Inc., Resource Applications, Inc.,
Geo/Resource Consultants, Inc., and Environmental Technology, Inc.

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OSC Arai interviewed the owner and operator of Visual Packaging, Mr. Bob Vernon. Mr. Vernon indicated that the following products were produced in the plant: hand soap, gasfinder, waterfinder, zinc oxide products, methanol blends, brake fluid, and isopropyl alcohol. Mr. Vernon stated that six (6) 1000 gallon tanks, two (2) of which were full of methanol, were present in the plant. Mr. Vernon also indicated that a number of drums were located on the roof of the building, and that the contents were unknown.

OSC Arai also questioned the City of Philadelphia Fire Marshall Ulshafer about making an entry into the building to assess the situation. The Fire Marshall stated that a safe entry could be made on the morning of 7-15-87 at the earliest. TAT and EPA determined that they should return on 7-15 to perform a site assessment. TATMs Scott and Williams performed logbook and photodocumentation of the site activities.

At 0925 hours on 7-15-87, TATMs Kevin Scott, Jack Williams, and Todd Chocholaty arrived on scene to perform a site assessment. The building, which houses Visual Packaging and rented businesses, was observed to be extensively damaged by fire and explosion. Concrete walls and large window panels were blown out and shattered by the blast. At 0953 hours, a PFD team entered the building to assess the fire damage and remaining fire hazard. Tennants who rented workshop space from Mr. Vernon were present and awaiting word on when they would be able to enter the building to remove belongings. One tenant entered the building and retrieved three cats from the rubble.

OSC Garrett Arai and Bill Steuteville from CERCLA Enforcement arrived on scene at 1040 hrs. The OSC held a meeting with Mr. Vernon and Mr. Steuteville to discuss the raw materials remaining in the building and the drums of unknowns on the roof. Mr. Vernon stated his current condition of bankruptcy on both his business and the property. Mr. Vernon stated that he will take no responsibility for the drums of unknowns left on the roof by a previous tenant. He will, however, take responsibility for cleaning up what remains of his products and raw materials. Mr. Vernon had also arranged for 24 hour security for the building. The OSC requested an inventory of materials housed in the building which will be used to develop a consent agreement for cleanup.

At 1120 hours, OSC Arai and Mr. Steuteville entered the building accompanied by PFD. TAT provided EPA with an explosimeter and an HNU photoionizer for the entry.

EPA exited the building at 1225 hours. The OSC noted the poor condition of the building, and reported finding the following contents:

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6 (six) 1000-gal. tanks which included:
3 tanks of Methyl t-Butyl Ether (MTBE) approx. 700 gal. each
1 (one) tank of isopropanol, approx. 600 gal.
1 (one) tank of mineral spirits, approx. 900 gal.
1 (one) empty tank
1 (one) 7000-gallon underground tank of Methanol
1 (one) 1-gallon can of Tetrahydrofuran (THF)
A pallet of glue reported to contain Toluene
Many drums, some damaged, some oils, unknowns.

TATMs Scott and Williams entered the building to perform TAT assessment at 1240 hours.

TAT exited the building at 1330 hours and reported the following contents:

Diethylene Glycol (brake fluid)
Sodium Silicate
Adhesive (Unspecified composition)
Cement Rubber (Unspecified composition)
Silicone (Unspecified composition)
Magic Lux Latex
Silco White Lithium No.2

Following a discussion with TAT, OSC and Mr. Steuteville discussed future plans with Mr. Vernon. Enforcement stated that Mr. Vernon should only provide site security until a cleanup plan can be drafted and approved by Enforcement.

The OSC stated that Mr. Steuteville may oversee site security and operation by Mr. Vernon. The OSC will not step in unless Mr. Vernon fails to comply with EPA Enforcement.

In a final meeting with the property owner, Mr. Vernon stated that he had obtained 24 hour site security as of 1700 hours on July 15, 1987.

The Fire Marshall, OSC, and TAT met to discuss the remaining concerns about site safety and possible causes of the blaze. PFD stated that they suspect arson as a cause, but that they are still investigating.

As a final measure, EPA secured the site with caution banner. TAT and EPA departed the scene at 1630 hrs.

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On July 23, 1987, a meeting was called by EPA Enforcement to evaluate the cleanup plan submitted by Mr. Vernon. In attendance were the following agencies: Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources (PA DER), U.S. Department of Labor (OSHA), City of Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections (LI), FPD, and the City Managing Directors Office. It was determined that an OSHA assessment of the facility was needed before the plan could be evaluated. The Department of Licenses and Inspections stated that they had declared the building Imminently Dangerous (ID) on July 22. OSHA, EPA Enforcement, and TAT would perform a site assessment on the morning of July 24, 1987.

On July 24, 1987 EPA Enforcement, OSHA, and TAT made an assessment of the building. TAT made a level "B" entry to monitor air quality with an Organic Vapor Analyzer. The following conditions were reported:

One (1) drum measured 700 units within one (1) foot of an open bung. An area containing numerous five (5) gallon cans labeled "Flammable Liquid" measured 20-30 units. Background readings within the building were from 0-1 unit.

Based on these findings, EPA Enforcement directed Mr. Vernon to replace the bung in the high reading drum. Mr. Vernon complied with the EPA request.

It was determined by OSHA that the work plan submitted by Mr. Vernon could begin when Mr. Vernon implemented the following changes:

1. The RP must stabilize portions of an unstable building facade.
2. The workers should secure unstable cartons in the work area.
3. Mr. Vernon should demark and secure approved work areas.
4. All aiseways within work area must be cleared.
5. All removed product or debris must be labeled and shipped accordingly.

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EPA Enforcement has been provided with Materials Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for all Visual Packaging Co. products.

Mr. Vernon signed the EPA Enforcement consent agreement on July 23, 1987.

Future Plans

EPA Enforcement will investigate potentially responsible parties (PRPs) and will negotiate regarding the work to be performed. Enforcement will attempt to contact the party who abandoned the drums of unknowns by way of an enforcement letter.

The OSC will pursue action on the abandoned drums which the PRP would not take responsibility for.

Mr. Vernon will begin work on the site within the guidelines of his work plan and the EPA Enforcement agreement.

Additional site photographs will follow.

Attachments:

Site Map
Area Map
Names of Site Contacts
POLREPs
Enforcement Letter Sent to Mr. Vernon (RP)
Draft EPA Enforcement Agreement
Work Plan Submitted by Responsible Party
Site Photographs

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BELLFIELD AVENUE FIRE
SITE CONTACTS

Bob Vernon, Property and business owner
Hauges Mill
Ambler, PA 19002
215-646-4714 Home
215-843-6487 Work

John Vernon, Plant Manager
Mt. Airy
Philadelphia, PA
215-844-7987 Days

Geoffrey W. Veith, Attorney to Mr. Vernon
Hecker, Rainer, and Brown
717 Two Penn Center Plaza
15th Street & JFK
Philadelphia, PA 19102
212-665-0400

U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Garrett Arai, On-Scene Coordinator
215-597-9800

Roy F. Weston Inc., Technical Assistance Team (TAT)
Kevin Scott
Jack Williams
Todd Chocholaty
53 Haddonfield Road
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609-482-0222

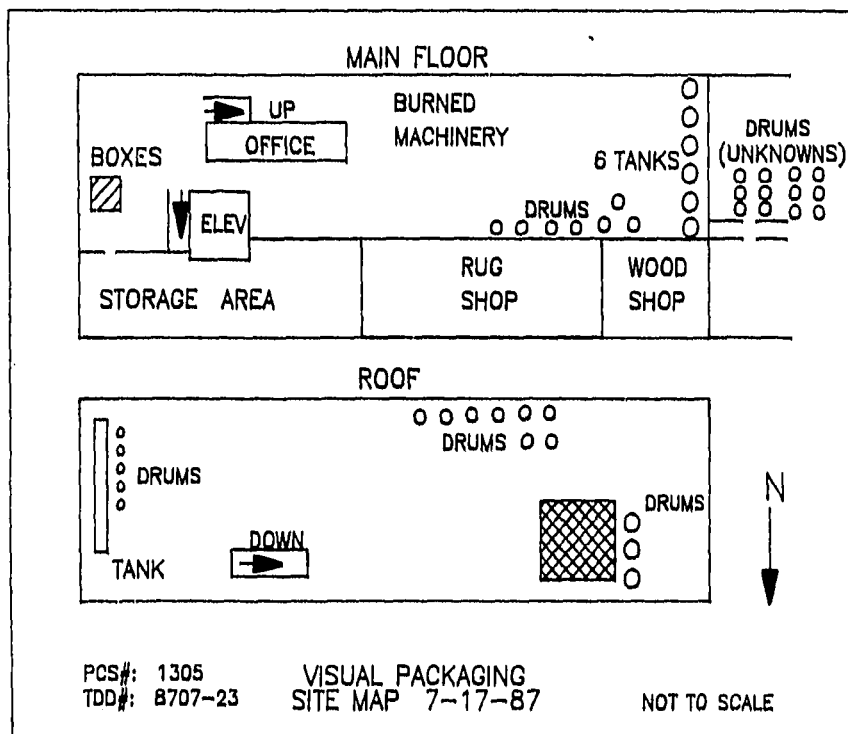
City of Philadelphia License and Inspections
Robert F. Hoyt
1101 Market Street, Suite 600
Philadelphia, PA
215-592-6073

U.S Department of Labor, OSHA
John Barry
215-596-1201
James Woodburn
U.S. Customs House, Room 242
Philadelphia, PA 19106
215-597-4956

City of Philadelphia Fire Marshall
Earl Sheldon
215-592-5962

City Managing Directors Office
John Hadalski
215-686-7114

Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources (PADER)
Robert Allen
215-565-1687



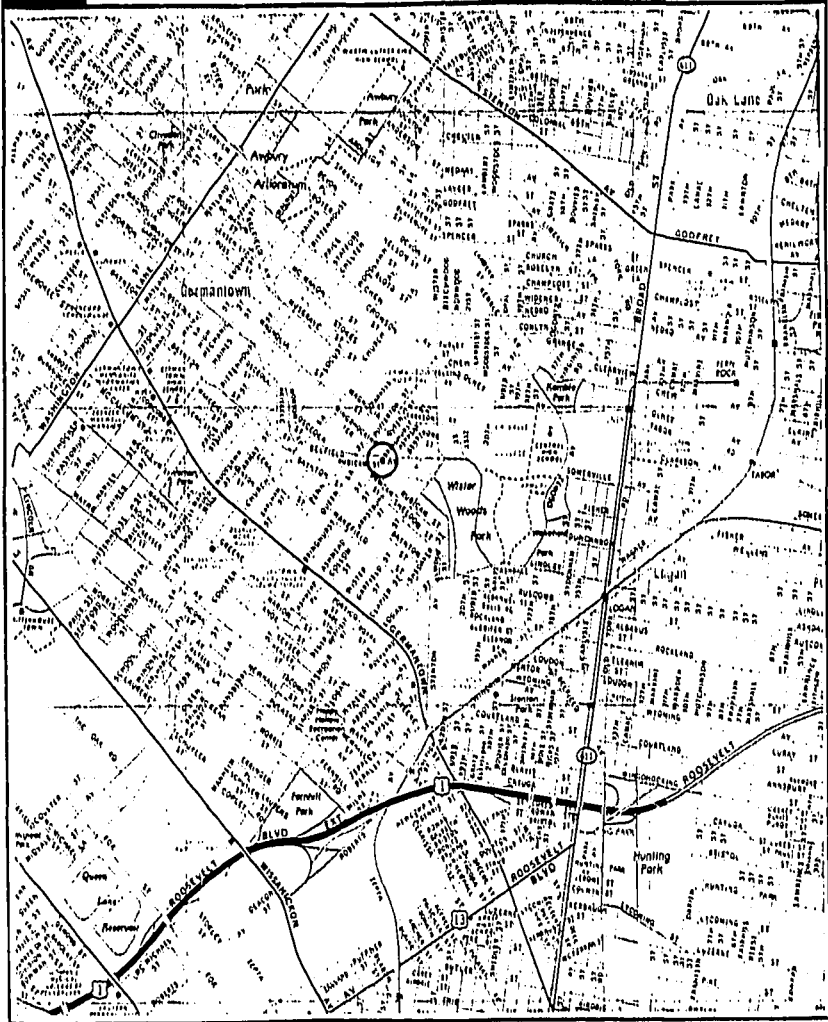
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WESTON SPER

TDD Number: 8707-23

PCS Number: 1305



Visual Packaging
Site Area

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